

Office of Religious Freedom – Stakeholders Conference

Panelists Biographies

**Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable John Baird**

*Ottawa West-Nepean (Ontario)*

Minister Baird was first elected to the House of Commons in 2005 and re-elected in 2008 and 2011. In February 2006, Mr. Baird was sworn in as President of the Treasury Board. In this role, he introduced and successfully steered the new *Federal Accountability Act* through both Houses of Parliament. In January 2007, he was named Minister of the Environment and, in October 2008, he became Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, where he spearheaded the design, negotiation and delivery of some 12,000 infrastructure stimulus projects across the country. In August 2010, he was named Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. From November 2010 to January 2011, he undertook additional responsibilities as Minister of the Environment.

Prior to entering federal politics, Mr. Baird was a member of Ontario's provincial legislature, where he represented the constituency of Nepean-Carleton from 1995 to 2005. During that time, he served as Minister of Community and Social Services, Energy, Francophone Affairs, Children and Youth Services, and as Government House Leader.

Mr. Baird is a long-time member of the Royal Canadian Legion, an honorary member of the Kiwanis Club of Nepean, and a lifetime member of Canada's largest Association for Community Living. In 2008, he was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, Maclean's Magazine and the Historica-Dominion Institute named him 2010 Parliamentarian of the Year, after a vote by his colleagues in all parties in the House of Commons. Mr. Baird holds a Bachelor of Arts in political studies from Queen's University.

**Parliamentary Secretary Robert (Bob) Dechert**

*Mississauga-Erindale (Ontario)*

Bob Dechert was elected to the House of Commons in 2008 and re-elected in 2011. Previously, he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. Mr. Dechert has served as a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and the Standing Committee on Finance.

Mr. Dechert is a former senior partner with the law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP, and a former president of the Empire Club of Canada. Mr. Dechert has lived in Mississauga for many years with his wife Ruth Clark.

[In order of appearance]

**Dr. Thomas Farr**

Thomas F. Farr is Visiting Associate Professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He is a senior fellow at Georgetown's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, where he directs the Religious Freedom Project, and the Program on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy. Farr is also a senior fellow of the Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, N.J. where he directs the Institute's task force on International religious freedom.

A former U.S. diplomat, Dr. Farr was the State Department's first Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom. After a career of 21 years he left the Foreign Service to write on religion and U.S. national interests. He has published articles in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *First Things*, *The Washington Post*, *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, *America Magazine*, *The Drake Law Review*, and *The Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, and has contributed essays to several edited volumes. He has appeared on many media outlets and blogs for the Washington Post's "On Faith" and the American Principles Project. His book, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security*, was published by Oxford University Press.

A Ph.D. in history from the University of North Carolina, Dr. Farr served in the U.S. Army and has taught at both the U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was a member of the Chicago World Affairs Council's Task Force on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy. Currently he is a member of the Board of Advisors of the John Templeton Foundation and the Alexander Hamilton Society, a contributing editor for the *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, and vice chair of Christian Solidarity Worldwide-USA, which defends religious freedom for all people.

**Father Raymond J. De Souza**

Fr. Raymond de Souza is a Queen's Alumnus (B.A. Honours in Economics and Masters in Public Administration). He also holds a Master's degree in Economics and Politics from the University of Cambridge, England. Subsequently, he began studies for priesthood, earning a License in Sacred Theology from the Santa Croce University in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Kingston in July, 2002. Fr. Raymond is a frequent contributor to various publications, including the National Post, The National Catholic Register, and First Things.

**Ms. Anne Brandner**

Anne Brandner is Director of Policy and International Relations for Toronto-based Global Peace Initiative. By cultivating relationships with leaders in government, business and royalty, GPI encourages high level action in response to religious freedom violations and human rights abuses. Through its philanthropic arm, GPI supports a range of agencies working on these issues internationally, and helps to develop effective collaborative strategies for responding to religious persecution. Together with local partners, GPI has led initiatives on behalf of marginalized or persecuted peoples around the world.

In her role, Anne helps develop the overall direction for GPI's activities, leads on government relations in Canada and the United States, and maintains close working relationships with GPI's partners around the globe. Previously, Anne worked as international policy analyst for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and acted as staff for the EFC's Religious Liberty Commission. Anne has now been a member of the Commission since 2006. Additionally, Anne serves on the Leadership Team of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP). With members in 18 countries, the RLP exists to nurture partnership and collaboration among Christian organizations worldwide that are focused on religious freedom.

Anne holds a Master's degree in Political Science. Her graduate research examined the pursuit of justice and reconciliation after genocide.

**Ms. Susanne Tamas**

Susanne Tamas is currently Director of Government Relations for the Bahá'í Community of Canada, a position she has held since the establishment of the Bahá'í Office of Government Relations in 1997. She has also served as an elected member of the national governing body of the Bahá'ís of Canada for the past twelve years. Susanne has been a member of the Bahá'í International Community's delegation to sessions of the UNGA Third Committee and Human Rights Council and has facilitated diplomatic training seminars with national Bahá'í representatives around the world. Formerly a teacher, social worker, Registrar and Manager of Student Services at community colleges, Susanne has lived in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, 6 Canadian provinces and in Ghana.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson**

Don Hutchinson is Vice-President, General Legal Counsel for The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and Director of the EFC's Centre for Faith and Public Life, located in Ottawa. The EFC is the national association of evangelical Christians in Canada. In his position, Don is part of the EFC's senior leadership team with responsibility for monitoring, researching and responding to patterns and developments in the law (both government and the courts) on issues of freedom of religion and promoting communicating Biblical principles on matters of public policy. Don has served as Chair of the Religious Liberty Commission since 2008, is a member of the Advocates International Task Force on Religious Freedom and a board member with Voice of the Martyrs Canada. Previously, Don served with The Salvation Army for 15 years and worked with World Vision Canada for 3 years.

**Dr. Frank Dimant**

Dr. Frank Dimant, Doyen of the Jewish professionals in Canada, is CEO of B'nai Brith Canada as well as CEO of the organization's Institute for International Affairs and the League for Human Rights for 33 years. He also serves as the publisher of *The Jewish Tribune*, which has the highest audited circulation of all Canada's Anglo-Jewish publications. In May 2008, Dr. Dimant was appointed the Chair of the newly inaugurated Department of Modern Israel Studies at Canada Christian College and the School of Graduate Theological Studies. This appointment was in recognition of his vast knowledge and expertise of Israel and the wider Middle East region. Dr. Dimant has led B'nai Brith Canada Human Rights missions to destinations throughout the world.

Dr. Dimant serves on several advisory boards in Canada and Israel. He is a member of the Government of Canada's Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, where he represents Canadian Jewry on safety and security issues. He is a long-standing member of the Israeli Government's Global Forum on Antisemitism. In January 2005, he became a member of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Advisory Council. He served on the Vaughan Mayor's Community Task Force on Safety and Security, as well as serving on the Toronto Police Chief's Advisory Board. In recognition of his commitment to human rights in this country, Dr. Dimant was inducted as Honorary Chief of First Nations Keewatin Tribal Council. He was presented with a family Coat of Arms by the Government of Canada in recognition of his leadership in the Canadian community. A frequent lecturer, writer and media commentator, Dr. Dimant is a recognized authority on both Israeli and Middle Eastern affairs and world Jewish issues. He is the co-editor of "From Immigration to Integration", published in 2001, which details the history of Canadian Jews.